



Newsletter No. 2

15 June 2012

A lot has been happening since our last Newsletter in the world of good science in Medicine and in **FSM**.

Website News

An upgrade of our website <http://www.scienceinmedicine.org.au/> was completed in 10 June 2012. It continues to cover the basics (history, principles, contact details etc), and other sections have been added.

A welcoming message from the President of **FSM** opens the Home page in the upgraded site.

A consensus position document on many of the issues **FSM** aims to address is presented in a separate section. **FSM** hopes that this will enable open critical discussions on the complex challenges facing modern Medicine.

With so many of our *Friends* sending us a wide range of great websites and amusing YouTubes, we have added a number of sections, including [Good Science in Medicine](#) and [Humour in CAM](#).

FSM Executive meets the Hon. Catherine King

On May 28, two members of the **FSM** Executive, Prof John Dwyer and Loretta Marron, travelled to Canberra to meet with the Hon. Catherine King, Parliamentary Secretary, Department of Health and Ageing. The aim of the meeting was to introduce the **FSM** to the Secretary, and to offer our support in a partnership with the Federal Government in promoting good science in Medicine.

Initially the discussion focused on the recent [draft guidelines](#) for listed medicines. **FSM** re-iterated our concerns that, despite scientific evidence for individual listed medicines showing that they failed to provide the benefit claimed, they were nevertheless permitted listings based on their 'traditional' history and status.

There was also considerable discussion on pseudo-science in universities (she acknowledged **FSM**'s success in this area), in particular regarding 'fundamentalist' chiropractors, their anti-vaccination stance, their outrageous claims for treating children and babies for a wide range of health conditions, their aggressive promotion of themselves as being more cost-effective than GPs and the new [Bachelor of Science \(Chiropractic\)](#) course at Central Queensland University. Other issues related to the omission of chiropractic and acupuncture from the 2012 Federal [Budget](#) initiative of identifying ineffective therapies currently attracting a [30% subsidy](#) on private health insurance premiums.

The meeting ended with the Parliamentary Secretary referring us to the appropriate people in the Health Minister's office to pursue the chiropractic and acupuncture issues.

This was the first of a number of planned meetings with politicians.

The first AGM

The **FSM** Executive had a full-day meeting in Adelaide on April 13. With the five founding members living in South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales, it was the first time the team had met face-to-face.

New member of **FSM** Executive

FSM is delighted to welcome Dr Cameron Martin as a new member of the **FSM** Executive. He is a general practitioner working in Eltham, Victoria. He is actively involved in advocating for general practice as deputy chair of the National Standing Committee for GP Advocacy & Support with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. He is also a member of the [Federal Dept of Health and Ageing committees for the Quality Use of Pathology](#), and [Demand Management Advisory Committee \(pathology\)](#). Articles written by Dr Martin include [Alternative Myths](#).

The number of *Friends* is now over 700, with new *Friends* being added daily. While we have *Friends* from all states, not all universities are represented.

FSM in the media

FSM is still prominent in the media, with a supportive two-page spread in Queensland written by Des Houghton in the May 27 Courier Mail (readership 750,000), entitled [Quacks galore in facade of quirky medicine](#).

The Scuttlebutt Section!

As you might expect, our opponents are doing all they can to discredit our attempts and to muddy our message. This section tells you some of what is going on. Please let us know of anything else you hear or read that can find its place in this section of the newsletter.

A number of alternative medicine websites are still making false claims about the **FSM**, including statements including one from the [The National Herbalists Association Australia \(NHA\)](#):

"A significant number of researchers and Doctors are pulling out of FSM as they feel they were 'hoodwinked' and weren't aware of the full picture" & "It is anticipated that even more members will withdraw in the next few weeks".

None of this is true.

It is not just those who promote alternative medicine who are spreading misinformation. Often *Friends* comment that some colleagues claim that the **FSM** does not support research into herbal remedies. As is clearly stated in the **FSM** [position document](#) on Medicine and pseudoscience, the **FSM** supports properly conducted [scientific research](#) into CAM and believes that this is a valid role for universities and research institutions. What **FSM** does *not* support is claims that these remedies have been researched when that 'research' has been badly done, lacks scientific credibility and is published (if at all) in outlets lacking scientific standing.

What's new since our last Newsletter?

Letters to universities and their responses:

In 2011, a [table published](#) by Australian Skeptics listed tertiary institutions alleged to be offering non-evidence-based health courses under a scientific banner. Interested in this account, **FSM** wrote to the Vice-Chancellors of all universities to enquire whether they were offering such courses and whether their university was committed to the principle of ensuring that all science offerings were, in fact, based on scientific evidence.

So far, of the 39 universities, 14 have responded. While the university project will continue, with the need to monitor new courses, a table summarising the responses to date has [been published](#) on our website.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration:

Following an invitation to comment on the new guidelines for listed medicines, the **FSM** sent [a response](#) which appears on this website.

Private Health Insurance (PHI):

Following the [Federal Budget 2012](#), the media announced that the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) had been given \$1 million and 12 months to investigate the services offered by unregistered practitioners for modalities such as *"homeopathy, Reiki, aromatherapy, iridology, ear candling, crystal therapy, flower essences, kinesiology and Rolfing."*

If they are found ineffective, these treatments will no longer attract the 30% subsidy on private health insurance premiums.

However, services offered by registered practitioners, including chiropractic and acupuncture, are outside the scope of the investigation.

Of the 36 PHIs, only one, the [Doctors Health Fund](#), does not support CAM. On June 8, **FSM** sent an [open letter](#) to the other 35 PHIs, asking them to confirm that they will withdraw insurance cover for all CAM modalities which the CMO determines to be lacking an evidence-base.

Items of interest

Government endorsed homeopathy in our private hospitals?:

In late May 2012, the Federal Government signed a [free trade agreement](#) with Malaysia, removing trade tariffs between our countries. While this is designed to encourage investment, of concern is that:

*"the agreement also allows Malaysian investors to participate in Australian private hospital services including massage, **homeopathy** and traditional medicine."*

Acknowledgments & Congratulations

FSM would be interested to hear of other universities introducing, or planning to introduce, pseudo-scientific courses.

A big thanks to our *Friends* who have had articles published recently. Please let us know if you have authored any relevant articles, or made any broadcasts, and where they have appeared.

Recent contributions include:

Prof Ian Musgrave [Will Naturopaths Really Provide More and More Illness Prevention?](#)

[How will we afford ear candling now?](#)

[At the Threshold of Irrelevance: An Overly Dilute Defence of Homeopathy](#)

Prof Marcello Costa [Does traditional Chinese medicine have a place in the health system?](#)

[Mind over matter? The ethics of using the placebo effect](#)

Prof Marcello Costa & Prof John Dwyer
[Budget good news: no taxpayer dollars for a 'bunch of hooey'](#)

Prof Marcello Costa & Prof Hubertus Jersmann
[Marcello Costa and Hubertus Jersmann: Chinese paradox](#)

Prof Alastair MacLennan & Prof Rob Morrison
[Tertiary education institutions should not offer pseudoscientific medical courses](#)

Prof Rob Morrison [SOT - Friends of Science in Medicine](#)
[SBS - Alternative Medicine courses questioned](#)

Prof Ray Lowenthal [Coffee enemas don't cure cancer: reviewing the remarkable claims of Ian Gawler](#)

Loretta Marron [Gawler & Gawler Vs Gawler](#)
[Homeopathy: Silly, safe or satanic](#)
[Rolfing, Kinesiology, Crystals and other Preternatural Practices! - Why am I'm paying for them?](#)

Dr Mick Vagg [What if there's no baby in the bathwater? Do we really need a CAM industry?](#)
[Psst Channel 9, don't mention the C-word on TV. Cure, that is...](#)

Dr Sue Ieraci [Sue Ieraci: True peer review](#)

Just a reminder, you can contact us at : info@scienceinmedicine.org.au (email) www.scienceinmedicine.org.au (website)